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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 002468

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#) [UK](#)  
SUBJECT: PRT LASHKAR GAH: HELMAND SEMI-ANNUAL REVIEW

REF: A. KABUL 1055  
[1B.](#) KABUL 2130  
[1C.](#) KABUL 2131

Classified By: PolCouns Sara Rosenberry for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

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SUMMARY  
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[11.](#) (C) The Taliban have been hit hard in Helmand over the past six months. Military operations in Nahri Sarraj and Sangin disrupted the Taliban and weakened their support but have not resulted in enduring stability. Despite this military disruption, the expansion of reconstruction and development (R&D), and small advances in governance, conditions remain fragile. This is evidenced by a deterioration of security in the central districts that threatens R&D efforts and could undermine already weak confidence in the government (Ref A). While Governor Wafa increased his outreach to tribal elders, he cannot boast great progress. Nor has he been a strong supporter of increasing government capacity to deliver services. He can however point to reintroducing a central government presence in Sangin.

[12.](#) (SBU) SUMMARY CONTINUED: As USAID and HMG pursue R&D and alternative livelihoods in Nahri Sarraj and Sangin, they confront worsened security in the central districts, e.g., monitoring projects just outside the provincial center has become extremely difficult. Early indications suggest that upcoming UNODC numbers for poppy cultivation in Helmand will be huge. The 2007 poppy eradication campaign did little to introduce risk into the opium trade, but some progress was seen on interdiction. Overall, efforts directed at northern districts have shown some positive results, but a potential risk in extending security, R&D, and the government's reach northward is that security in the center, where the IROA has the strongest presence, will deteriorate. To counter this, ISAF, the PRT and IROA are accelerating their efforts to beef up police recruitment and training. END SUMMARY

Security  
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13. (C) In the first half of the year ISAF/Coalition forces and the Afghan Government struck the Taliban hard, in particular in Nahri Sarraj and Sangin districts. The operations resulted in numerous Taliban deaths, including a number of commanders. This disrupted ) at least temporarily - Taliban command and control and made local recruitment more difficult. However, the series of operations that commenced in March has yet to bring enduring stability. In June, two ISAF/Coalition clashes with the Taliban in Nahri Sarraj resulted in civilian deaths, hampering progress in R&D (Ref B), and a spate of security incidents in Sangin increased concerns of Taliban re-infiltration (Ref C). (NOTE: An increase in the number of IEDs and mines in recent months reveals a shift in Taliban tactics, largely in response to ISAF/IROA operations. END NOTE)

14. (C) Security remains the primary concern of Afghans living in the central districts, where the government exerts the greatest control and where security deteriorated in the first half of the year. While the provincial center, Lashkar Gah, has not experienced a suicide bombing since March, violence against and intimidation of Afghans with government links continued. This included attacks against Afghan National Police (ANP) and the Taliban's letter to the Independent Election Commission head warning him to resign his position. Increased insecurity, however, should not be attributed solely to the insurgency, as crime levels have risen, including an increase in violent crime (kidnappings and shootings). Travel for the PRT's official civilians has contracted significantly in recent months and currently extends only to downtown Lashkar Gah. The neighboring district of Nad Ali also has seen greater violence, as

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evidenced by an increase in IEDs (including suicide bombings against the ANP and a roadside bomb against ISAF), the murder of a local mayor, and a violent shootout between rival tribal factions. Motives behind the violence likely involve a mix of Taliban infiltration, tribal conflicts, and fights over opium.

15. (C) The ANP did nothing to dispel a reputation for crime and corruption, including accusations of looting after military operations and the arrest of approximately 35 patrolmen in July for stealing fuel. The government has been unable to effectively deploy security forces behind the ANA to stabilize districts like Sangin. Those deployed have largely been untrained and ill-disciplined.

Political  
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16. (C) Early in the year, Governor Wafa's outreach to tribal leaders flagged as he declared support for military operations a prerequisite for drawing leaders into the government's orbit. However, with the launch of operations in Sangin and Nahri Sarraj, Wafa's engagement and enthusiasm increased. He has since attended shuras in both districts (with ISAF/IROA protection and just days after operations ended) and engaged elders in Lashkar Gah. To date, however, he can boast no success in bringing tribal leaders firmly onto the government's side, though he has reintroduced a government presence to Sangin by appointing an interim District Governor and Police Chief.

17. (C) In developing local government capacity, Wafa remains a largely obstructionist force as he hoards power and distrusts attempts to empower others. The Governor disdains most other provincial officials and greets Kabul visitors with skepticism and scant support. The Provincial Council (PC) continues to limp along, with claims of regular contacts with constituents but little supporting evidence. Nevertheless, there has been some progress. With PRT facilitation, the local government established a Civil Service Training Center, greatly needed in a province with

limited human resources. The Provincial Development Council (PDC) now meets regularly, and members are making small moves toward embracing a collective view of development, rather than guarding narrow interests. The PRT effectively runs the PDC, as currently there is no secretariat.

#### Economy, Reconstruction and Development

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¶8. (C) Insecurity continues to prevent significant progress on R&D and alternative livelihoods (AL). Violent incidents involving those working on R&D/AL, including the murder of a local contractor at a project site and the kidnapping of an NGO's local engineer, remain a worry, although motives may be criminality and not Taliban intimidation. Polls show that concern over R&D is on the rise among Afghans in the central districts. Travel restrictions on PRT official civilian staff mean that projects outside Lashkar Gah cannot be directly monitored without military support. The security environment in Nahri Sarraj and Sangin has slowed progress on the Kajaki project, described by Governor Wafa as the most important project in Helmand.

¶9. (C) Despite the insecurity, several R&D/AL projects saw progress this year. Examples of projects launched include USAID's contract farming, with over 250 farmers contracted to grow chili peppers, and the UK's projects on road construction, well sinking, and micro-finance. In addition, the government privatized marble and carpentry factories in Lashkar Gah, which could create dozens of new jobs in the coming months. (COMMENT: The privatization might be little more than a money laundering operation, given the strong narco-links attributed to at least one investor. END COMMENT) Despite security concerns and intimidation of local workers, R&D/AL projects are also proceeding in Nahri Sarraj and Sangin.

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#### Cultural/Social

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¶10. (SBU) The insecure environment continues to work great hardship on the education sector. Even in the central districts, regular school attendance decreased during the first half of the year. Nad Ali district had only two schools operating. The education director reported that the number of schools closing in Helmand increased, resulting in an influx of students to Lashkar Gah. Also, Afghans in the central districts reported a drop in access to medical care.

#### Counter-Narcotics (CN)

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¶11. (C) There is little evidence that CN efforts have introduced risk into Helmand's poppy trade, and the 2007 poppy cultivation statistics will far exceed last year's record levels in the province. The UN Office of Drug Control has estimated that approximately 90 percent of the arable land used for agriculture was devoted to poppy cultivation. In a PEP survey of 124 farmers whose fields were eradicated earlier this year, all declared the campaign "unfair" and all intend to plant poppy next year. Government justice sector officials in Helmand bemoan the high level of corruption in the last eradication campaign, particularly at the district level. Nevertheless, there was progress. The CN Police displayed an enhanced capacity to undertake interdiction operations, executing raids on bazaars and heroin laboratories and impounding opium, heroin and chemicals used in production. However, the lack of arrests associated with those raids indicates that those efforts may have been compromised.

#### Comment

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¶12. (C) There has been identifiable -- though at times quite limited -- progress in all PRT lines of operation. Military operations in the north have had a significant impact on the Taliban, permitted the government to attempt to reassert its influence, and provided opportunities to win local consent through reconstruction. While consolidation of gains achieved there has been an elusive goal, the government and ISAF could see momentum build in their efforts on governance and R&D/AL. There is a nevertheless a risk that directing resources to extend security, development, and the government's reach in the north might lead to Taliban infiltration and deteriorating security in the center. Diminished attention to the center could erode confidence in the government and undermine efforts elsewhere. Compounding this would be continued difficulty in introducing risk into the opium trade. Stepped up police recruitment and training could help bring stability to the north while maintaining security in the center.

WOOD